

Voluntary return

This page provides advice and information to people who might consider leaving the UK and returning home after making an asylum application.

Some people might consider leaving the UK and returning home after making an asylum application. This might be while they are awaiting a decision, after being granted leave to remain or after having their application refused. They may make their own arrangements to leave the UK and return. Or they can apply for help from one of the assisted voluntary return programmes run in the UK. It is also possible to approach the UK Border Agency (UKBA) directly and ask for assistance.

For more information on voluntary returns programmes [visit the Refugee Council website](#).

Considering return

Many reasons and factors may influence a decision to return. Sometimes people decide to return even though they still fear persecution and the risks of returning remain very high. Some may feel compelled to return to meet personal or family needs. Others may feel they have no choice but to return if their asylum claim is refused. Some may find it too hard to cope with their living conditions in the UK, the mental stress of life as an asylum seeker or refugee, or the loss of social status and prospects. Others may decide that conditions in their home country have changed sufficiently enough for them to think it is safe to return.

Great care should be taken before any decision to return is made. Asylum seekers and others should seek legal advice before applying to an assisted return programme as this may jeopardise any outstanding asylum application. If they do apply to return, the UKBA asylum caseworker is likely to ask questions about their reasons for applying. Refugees and others with leave to remain in the UK may lose their leave or the right to enter the UK if they return to their home country (the country from which s/he claims fear of persecution).

Both refugees and asylum seekers should seek advice before leaving the UK and returning to their home country. They may find it helpful to get assistance from advisers when they apply for assisted voluntary return and also after they have returned. Confidential advice and informal counselling about assisted voluntary return may be obtained from [IOM's implementing partners](#).

PLEASE NOTE

If an asylum seeker leaves the UK, the UKBA will treat their application as having been withdrawn. People granted asylum or leave to remain in the UK may lose their status and right to enter in the UK if they return to their country of origin.

Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme

The Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP) offers assistance to people wishing to return permanently to their country of origin. It is run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on behalf of UKBA. The programme is open to:

- Asylum seekers
- People with ELE/ELR
- People with DL
- Asylum seekers appealing against a refusal of asylum by UKBA
- Asylum seekers whose applications UKBA has rejected

VARRP is not open to:

- People who have been granted humanitarian protection, indefinite leave to remain and/or refugee status
- People who have been served a deportation order
- People for whom UKBA has already made arrangements to remove from the UK
- Short term immigration detainees for whom removal directions have been set
- Convicted prisoners subject to deportation
- Immigration detainees, detained solely in relation to immigration offences, who are assessed by the detention services as violent, disruptive or who may present a risk of absconding
- People convicted of violent or sexual crimes, or serious immigration offences
- People who have received UK custodial sentences of 12 months or longer
- People involved in ongoing matters in the criminal justice system

GOOD PRACTICE

When advising someone on the option of return it is important to consider the following:

Impartiality: it is crucial that advice is given without assuming that the process will end in actual return. The adviser should not have a vested interest in this outcome. Voluntary return must be genuinely voluntary.

Information: decisions on return should be well-informed. People considering return may benefit from detailed information about conditions in the home country and about their options in the UK.

Follow-up: a person's information and advice needs may not end after arrival in the home country. Advisers should consider what additional help they may be able to offer a person after return.

Others held in immigration detention are eligible for VARRP and can apply to IOM.

VARRP offers:

- Advice, counselling and information about return
- Help with obtaining travel documents and payment of costs incurred
- A flight home
- A 'meet and greet' service at airport on return (for most countries)
- Help with onward travel to final destination
- Reintegration assistance
- A relocation cash grant of £500 per family member returning paid on departure at the UK airport

Reintegration assistance can include, if required, extra baggage allowance, up to three months temporary accommodation following return and payment of childcare fees for infants. Each returnee will be able to draw up an Individual (or family) Return Plan with IOM and choose help with small business set-up, schooling fees, vocational training, or job placements. Reintegration assistance is in-kind and is not paid in cash to the individual returnee. Each family member who accompanies the main applicant on return can receive reintegration assistance

UKBA policy is, in most cases, to refuse applications to VARRP where a person has previously left the UK on the programme and subsequently returned to the UK. However, UKBA will consider such applications and will take into account the particular circumstances of each applicant. UKBA advises that relevant factors may include: a significant change in the country situation, a new basis of asylum claim, and previous participation in VARRP as a dependant.

Applications to VARRP will be rejected by UKBA where an applicant has made previously two or more applications to the programme. Applications may be approved on an exceptional basis where the applicant can show good reasons as to why s/he withdrew earlier applications or did not return within the time period allowed (in most cases, VARRP applications remain open for 3 months).

Applying to VARRP

Asylum seekers and people with leave to remain in the UK should seek advice before applying to VARRP. Applications for VARRP should be made to the UK office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). There is a specific VARRP application form to complete and a declaration of voluntary return form to be signed. You can download these from the [IOM website](#).

IOM sends VARRP applications to UKBA for individual approval or rejection. There is no right of appeal or formal review process for applicants if UKBA refuses the application and UKBA does not give reasons for the refusal to individual applicants. Applicants can withdraw from VARRP at any stage in the process, even including and up to boarding the plane. If s/he has not departed the UK within three months of applying for VARRP, UKBA will treat the application as withdrawn. If people in detention want to apply, IOM will interview them in the detention centre.

If the applicant has to visit the embassy or consulate of their national authorities, for example, in order to acquire travel documentation, the UKBA or the immigration detainee escort contractor will probably escort them. They will also escort them from the detention centre to airside on departure. IOM staff will then accompany them to the plane. Prisoners may also be eligible for VARRP. They can apply to IOM from prison. But they need to finalise their return arrangements with IOM after release.

Please Note

In some countries of return, IOM may encounter difficulties in providing reintegration assistance, with provision of in-kind reintegration assistance for those returning to certain countries either severely restricted or totally impractical in some circumstances. Individuals and advisers can seek current details from IOM or from one of its implementing partners.

Help from International Social Services

People with indefinite leave to remain (ILR) who have been in the UK for three years and who are non-European nationals can apply to International Social Services (ISS) of the UK for help to return. ISS provide advice by telephone and office appointments. They also make visits throughout the UK.

Contact:
UK International Social Services (ISS)
Canterbury Court, Unit 1.11 1-3 Brixton Road
London SW9 6DE
& 0207 735 8941
www.issuk.org.uk

Return and Rebuild

'Return and Rebuild' offers extra support for those returning to Afghanistan or Iraq to help with the reconstruction of homes as part of VARRP. It can be provided in addition to the standard forms of help under VARRP. It is available to those who return between the 1st of September 2008 and 31st August 2009. 'Return and Rebuild' offers in-kind assistance worth up to £2,000 per case (i.e. single people and families can receive up to £2,000) to help returnees who need to rebuild or repair their homes. It can be used to pay for building materials and where agreed with IOM for specialist labour costs. It cannot be used to buy land or for redecoration.

Returnees to Afghanistan or Iraq can receive 'Return and Rebuild' help in addition to the standard VARRP package; for example in addition

to the standard forms of assistance with starting a business, or with schooling and college fees, or with vocational training or employment. However, assistance under one form of reintegration assistance in VARRP cannot be transferred and added to another. For instance, the £2000 allocated for 'Return and Rebuild' cannot be used for business set-up or to pay school fees. The 'Return and Rebuild' funds, as with all forms of reintegration assistance under VARRP, should be requested within three months of return and used within a year of return. The payments can be made in one go or staggered.

To apply for 'Return and Rebuild' assistance, a returnee to Afghanistan or Iraq just needs to apply to IOM for help under VARRP. A separate application for 'Return and Rebuild' assistance is not needed; returnees can discuss their needs with IOM caseworkers based in the UK or in Afghanistan or Iraq.

ZIM-VARRP

ZIM-VARRP is a 6-month project, starting on 1 February 2009, which provides additional humanitarian assistance to people who wish to return to Zimbabwe under VARRP. The reintegration assistance package has been enhanced to include an increase in the pre-departure relocation grant, an increase in the in-kind business assistance, and provide a cholera prevention assistance package. Individuals and advisers should contact IOM for further details of the assistance that can be offered.

Iraqis Rebuilding Iraq

Iraqis Rebuilding Iraq (IRI) offers Iraqis living abroad the chance to carry out short-term work to help reconstructing Iraq for up to a year with a compensation package. Candidates must speak fluent Arabic or Kurdish and have achieved professional success abroad. The Iraqi Ministry of Planning & Development Co-operation runs IRI in partnership with IOM and the UN Development Programme.

Interested experts abroad can log on to [IRI's website](#) and apply for vacancies. Also, employers can post vacancies on the website. Applicants must hold at least a bachelor's degree. Any Iraqi considering taking up an assignment with IRI should first seek legal advice as it can affect their right to stay or re-enter the UK. People with refugee status, ELR/ELE, HP or DL should also contact their local UNHCR office for information.

Advice and assistance

The following implementing partners of IOM provide specialist and confidential advice, information and informal counselling to refugees and asylum seekers thinking about returning to their country of origin.

Choices

London
Refugee Action,
3rd Floor, The Old Fire Station
150 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8SB
020 7654 7713

Leeds
Suite 7, Floor C,
Josephs Well
Hanover Walk
Park Lane
Leeds LS3 1AB
0113 244 5345

Manchester
4th Floor, Dale House
35 Dale Street
Manchester M1 2HF
General tel: 0161 233 1216/1219
Client free phone: 0800 917 2719

Leicester
Chancery House
7 Millstone Lane
Leicester LE1 5JN
0116 261 6200

North of England Refugee Service
2 Jesmond Road West
Newcastle Upon Tyne NE2 4PQ
0191 245 7311

19 Bigg Market
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 1UN
0191 245 7301

19 Villiers Street
Sunderland
SR1 1EJ

0191 510 8685

Third Floor, Sylvan House
12/16 Woodlands Road
Middlesbrough
TS1 3BE
01642 217 447

Safe Haven Yorkshire
Sheffield & 0114 256 1033
Hull & 01482 594950

Refugee & Migrant Centre
1st Floor
Roma Parva
9 Waterloo Road
Wolverhampton
WV1 4NB
01902 311 554

Individuals should also seek advice from their legal representatives or advisers prior to applying to a return programme as it may affect their asylum application or right to stay in the UK.

Voluntary Returns Project

The Voluntary Returns Project (VRP) at the Refugee Council provides information and can answer enquiries about voluntary return from refugee community organisations, advisers, researchers and others. It cannot offer immigration advice to individuals. The VRP produces mailings with information about assisted voluntary return, and issues relevant to voluntary return, for refugee community organisations.

The VRP team also contributes to the development of voluntary and assisted return programmes for refugees and asylum seekers, and resources and facilitates implementation groups of agencies involved in assisted voluntary return programmes.

Voluntary Returns Project
International & UK Policy Team
Refugee Council
240-250 Ferndale Road
London SW9 8BB
020 7346 1175/1176

Contacting family members abroad

Some refugees and asylum seekers may have lost contact with family members outside the UK. The International Tracing and Message Service of the British Red Cross (BRC) can help families separated through conflict, upheaval or natural disaster. It offers the following free services:

- Tracing service: through the International Committee of the Red Cross and through the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, enquiries can be made to find relatives with whom families have lost contact due to war or disaster.
- Message service: the BRC helps to deliver family news internationally when normal means of communication have broken down due to war or disaster. This is done using a Red Cross message (RCM).
- Certification of detention: BRC can also provide certification of detention for those people who were visited by the International Committee of the Red Cross whilst imprisoned.
- Travel assistance: BRC also handles applications for travel assistance from refugees in the UK so that their close family members can be reunited with them in the UK. Details of your local British Red Cross office can be found on the [Red Cross website](#).

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